"Is there something wrong with that?": The Transculturation of Martin Luther King, Jr., Schools in Germany

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"Everybody's going to think that we have a black school there."[1]

A man named Dale Dunn made the above statement in 1998 in Riverside, California, at a school board meeting convened to decide whether to name the new local high school after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. More than twenty individuals spoke in opposition at the meeting of more than three hundred people, first stating that they were not racist, and then making "arguments [against King's name] that board trustee Roger Luebs said were 'not rational.'"[2] Rational or not, Dunn succinctly encapsulated what other parents opposed to the idea had said: naming the school after King would place their children at a disadvantage when it came time to apply for college admission, because committees would associate their school with inner-city, low-performing schools bursting at the seams with "black" students. According to the "concerned" parents of Riverside, which is two-thirds white, they were not racist; everyone else was. And they simply wanted to protect their children from unconscious—or conscious—bias.

Despite my desire to respond to Dunn and his statement with "Is there something wrong with that?" I appreciate his brutally honest demonstration of the severe friction that occurs when the values and beliefs

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1. Tom Gorman, "Riverside School to Be Named after King," *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1998.

2. Ibid.

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of (white) majority culture converge with those of (people of color) minority cultures in the United States. Even though, as one school board member emphasized, King's principles and legacy "are transracial,"[3] and, as school board president Lewis Vanderzyl stated, King and "the things for which he worked so hard are things that all Americans can stand to consider,"[4] "they" (read: white majority culture) ostensibly do not agree. "They" have drawn racial and socioeconomic boundaries around him and his name, associating him with impoverished and troubled schools in the inner city rather than associating those characteristics with the results of white flight.[5] The vehement opposition of the parents in Riverside indicates not just that they lack the desire to challenge these boundaries but that they tacitly endorse them, especially in highly contested public spaces such as schools.

As producers of culture, transmitting among other things attitudes and beliefs about race and class, American schools have been at the center of the fight for civil rights for over a century. Aside from their practical function, they typically have been considered institutions of cultural assimilation. However, scholars have also seen them as "arenas"[6] in which individuals struggle over cultural identity. G. Genevieve Patthey-Chavez notes that public schools are spaces in which "cultural boundaries are negotiated with 'minority' and 'majority' in conflict over the extent to which their versions of a cultural identity are to be reproduced in the American educational system."[7] For example, we see struggles over whether a school will use textbooks that emphasize intelligent design or evolution,

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. A great deal of research has been devoted to the phenomenon of "white flight" and the detrimental socioeconomic effects it has had on urban neighborhoods and their school systems. In general, white flight leaves underfunded schools in its wake, perpetuating cycles of limited educational opportunity and poverty. See Kerner Commission, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968); Ta-Nehesi Coates,, "The Case for Reparations," *Atlantic*, June 2014; David Mosenskis, "Systemic Racial Bias in Latest Pennsylvania School Funding," *Power Interfaith*, October 2014, https://powerinterfaith.org/racial-bias-in-pennsylvanias-funding-of-public-schools/; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

6. See Pyrs Grufford, "The Countryside as Educator: Schools, Rurality and Citizenship in Inter-war Wales," *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, no. 4 (1996): 412–23.

7. G. Genevieve Patthey-Chavez, "High School as an Arena for Cultural Conflict and Acculturation for Latino Angelinos," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1993): 33.

or whether students should take sex education courses. These conflicts, with "race relations . . . often at the center,"[8] arise over not only curriculum and texts but also over commemorative acts, school holidays, mascots, symbols, mottoes, and, last but not least, school names.

Naming public spaces in general after historical figures identifies the nature of a community's moral compass, its points of orientation. When we attach specific names to schools, we magnify this dynamic. In 2002, cultural geographer Derek Alderman extended the notion of schools as cultural arenas to an analysis of school names, highlighting the manner in which they contribute to the "shaping of collective memory and historical identity of their students and the attendant community."[9] They function like cultural synecdoches, representing larger systems of attitudes and behaviors. "By merging history and the physical environment, place names . . . work to reify certain visions of the past, giving them legitimacy and identification with the natural order of things."[10] This effect is amplified when it applies to school names. As cultural geographer Roger Stump notes, "The naming of a school in honor of an individual has a special significance, creating an overt association between the person and the community. This act is essentially hortatory, calling on the community to follow the path set by the school's namesake." When a school, part of the one social institution that almost every child in America will have contact with, decides to align itself with a particular individual, it makes specific statements about the value system it will transmit. Historical figures have highly quantifiable and verifiable characteristics directly associated with particular traits and behaviors. As such, a school much more pointedly asserts its identity and intention when naming itself after a person than a locality, the other typical choice.[11] The decision, for example, to name a

8. Derek H. Alderman, "School Names as Cultural Arenas: The Naming of U.S. Public Schools after Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Urban Geography* 23, no. 7 (2002): 605.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. The naming of schools in the United States is a much more complicated process than one might think. As public schools are administered at the state level, each state has different rules regarding the naming of public elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools. In some states, elementary schools can only be named after presidents, while in other states they can be named after specific categories of people. In some states, high schools can only be named after local regions. This is one variable that affects how many schools might actually name themselves MLK if these restrictions did not exist.

school after Robert E. Lee[12] conveys a very different message than the decision to name it after King.

Despite a group's intention to convey a specific message by naming a school after an individual, polyvocality can often interfere with it. Alderman draws on Peter Nas's description of the polyvocal nature of a public space named after a historical figure,[13] which maintains that such places "often possess an official meaning, bearing the intentions of the creator or creators in mind, but informal references may be attached to them, enforcing, neutralizing, and even counteracting the original intention."[14] The case of Riverside is a perfect example. "The process of attaching King's name to the high school was open to multiple and competing interpretations about what it symbolized. Some parents attached certain social references and racial meanings to the school's name that ran counter to the official intentions and motivations of school board members."[15] Those multiple interpretations emerge from multiple cultures and their agendas, and they become enmeshed in the larger imaginary.

Polyvocality does not exclude the possibility of multiple legitimate interpretations. However, the conflicts between the agendas of competing cultures that shape those interpretations can provoke an examination of them, which Alderman, prompted by the case in Riverside, undertook. He explored the legitimacy of claims that schools named after King are exclusively inner city and predominately African American. His analysis of the 110 schools named after Martin Luther King, Jr., (hereafter "MLK schools") in the United States lent limited empirical support to the

12. A number of newspapers and journals have covered the current debates over renaming the more than one hundred schools named after Confederate soldiers, leaders, and other figures. While those in favor of keeping the names claim that retaining the names acknowledges the history of the community, those opposed assert that the names project an endorsement of discrimination and a celebration of the era of slavery. See for example, Jesse J. Holland, "US High Schools Named after Confederate Generals Consider Rebranding as New Academic Year Dawns," *Independent*, August 30, 2017; Eva Marie Ayala, Eva Marie, and Corbett Smith, "Dallas ISD Wants to Strip Confederate Names from Schools, But How?," *Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 2017; Moriah Balingit and T. Rees Shapiro, "A Debate over a School Named for a Confederate General Divides a Community," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2017; Nick Roll, "Robert E. Lee's Namesake," *Inside Higher Education*, August 23, 2017.

13. Peter Nas, "Introduction: Congealed Time, Compressed Place; Roots and Branches of Urban Symbolic Ecology," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 4 (1998): 547.

14. As cited by Alderman, "School Names as Cultural Arenas," p. 605.

15. Ibid.

claims made by the parents at Riverside. His findings suggested that MLK schools, primarily elementary, middle, and junior high schools, though perhaps not ideally integrated or distributed across the United States, are nonetheless quite varied in their nature and composition.[16] MLK schools are often more conspicuously culturally and ethnically diverse than other schools, and they more often than not are located in urban areas, but it is virtually impossible to make any generalizations about their students' socioeconomic status, academic performance, or the schools' national rankings.[17] Naming a school after King may highlight diversity, but it does not cause a positive or negative performance outcome. With its robust academic programs, ethnic and cultural diversity, and commendable state and national ranking, what eventually indeed did become Martin Luther King High School in Riverside is an especially potent example of this.[18]

If these schools are as varied as data indicate, then the question arises as to how polyvocal MLK schools in the United States are. Are

16. Alderman analyzed all schools named after Martin Luther King, Jr., or MLK in the United States, which totaled 110. He noted that the schools were mostly located in the North/Northeast and on the West Coast. They were also "disproportionately in the central cities of large and mid-size urban areas" (ibid., p. 601). He further determined that, although African Americans comprised 52% of the schools' students, their distribution was highly varied. However, as a cultural geographer, Alderman was more interested in distribution than other factors, such as performance or ranking. Currently, according to the Data for the Common Core, there are 97 schools in the United States named after Martin Luther King, Jr. The characteristics remain virtually the same regarding location and ethnic composition, with the majority of MLK schools still appearing in urban areas, and African Americans comprising a little more than 50% of students attending them. However, distribution is quite varied. While some MLK schools, particularly those located in the South/Southeast had a majority African American student population, at least two of the MLK schools are predominately white. Two are Chinese immersion schools. One is an alternative high school in Davis, California, with only seventeen students. MLK schools on the West Coast have a large Latinx student population.

17. Because Alderman is a cultural geographer rather than a sociologist or education specialist, he did not examine performance factors. A search of the Common Core of Data, however, as well as other resources available, indicate that there is no consistent statement one can make about the performance of MLK schools. Some are low-, some average-, and others high-performing.

18. As determined by a number of databases and the *Martin Luther King High School Accountability Report Card* (2017), King High has a robust academic program, has been awarded a number of honors, offers AP courses, a robotics program, a highly regarded music program, science Olympiad, and a number of other programs that contribute to the intellectual life of its students. It occupies a place in the upper rankings of schools in America, has a high diversity rating, and does not seem to be suffering from negative associations in regard to college placement.

the struggles over versions of cultural identities highly varied as well? In what ways do MLK schools in the United States conceive of themselves? Do they share an identity narrative or diverge significantly? Fortunately, we have access to a resource that, despite its flaws,[19] still lends a much sharper contour to the manners in which these schools understand their namesake's path and encourage others to follow it. Most MLK schools in the United States offer a mission statement on their websites. Mission statements are "a written declaration of an organization's core purpose and focus that normally remains unchanged over time." They "separate what is important from what is not . . . and communicate a sense of intended direction to the entire organization."[20] As such, a mission statement ideally identifies not only the *who* but also the *how* and *why* of an organization, the "version of a cultural identity" that it wishes to transmit to the rest of the community. Mission statements allow schools that associate themselves with King to declare officially and publicly why they do.

A survey of a cross-section of mission statements of MLK schools in the United States[21] revealed a few common threads running throughout them. The majority of MLK school mission statements lead first and foremost with the importance of academic success. MLK schools in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Florida, and Washington, DC, emphasize "advanced placement course work and exams," "educational" or "academic excellence," "twenty-first-century learners," "demanding educational agendas," and "rigorous" curricula. In New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine, MLK schools underscore "revolutioniz[ing] the education process," "excellence in education," "nurturing and challenging learning environments," and students being "leaders in their own learning." In Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin, MLK schools stress "academic excellence," "dynamic instruction," "dynamic

19. Websites often suffer from neglect, are not updated enough, or ever. Sometimes a lack of funds prompts neglect, or simple absentmindedness. Sometimes updates are planned but then experience delays. For these and other reasons, websites can be flawed sources of information. In my analysis, I have drawn as much as possible on websites that have been updated within at least the last eighteen months.

20. *Business Dictionary*, s.v. "mission statement," http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/mission-statement.html.

21. I examined over 40 mission and vision statements from 97 different MLK schools, distributing my reading regionally in order to have examples from the West Coast, North, Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest. I speak here in terms of states rather than individual schools for the sake of expediency.

education," "scholars," and "high-quality education." In California, which by far has the largest number of MLK schools, mission statements speak of "scholars" who are "college and career ready," "academic excellence," "relevant and collaborative learning at the highest scholarly level," "world class education," "rigorous," "standards-based . . . instruction," "dynamic learning communit[ies]," and "high-achieving" students. In Washington State, MLK schools have the goal of "creating a school that knows no limits to the academic success of each student," "focused instruction," and an "equitable, quality education." Perhaps more importantly, the majority of the schools also set attending an institute of higher education as a primary goal. They "prepare students for college," and they are devoted to "creating a college culture" and "college and career ready" students. Going one step further, several MLK schools are specifically college preparatory schools. Even when MLK schools do not directly refer to university, they still encourage life-long interest in learning, scholarship, and critical thinking.

Though all the schools place a premium on embracing diversity and treating all people with respect, few of them profile it at the beginning of their mission statements, most likely because the association with King is in itself a declaration of belief in the value of diversity. Academics come first, and they are rigorous, challenging, innovative, and future oriented. In short, the majority of MLK schools, which are still as diverse and varied as before,[22] see themselves as institutions dedicated to providing a quality education and cultivating intelligence, vehicles to better socioeconomic opportunity and equality. Project-based instruction and novel learning environments, which in several cases are a function of necessity,[23] prompt

22. There is a wide variety of MLK schools, and their ethnic composition varies from state to state. In the Northeast, you find two Chinese-language immersion schools, schools with a predominately white student body. In the Southeast, the student body is predominately African American. On the West Coast, each MLK school has a different composition, some with a predominately Latinx student body, others with a mixture of Latinx, African American, Asian, white, Native American, and Pacific Islander students.

23. A number of MLK schools engage in alternative instruction because their students have encountered problems with more conventional curricula and schools in the past. Some of them are continuation schools, schools for traumatized children, or schools in challenging areas where violence is prevalent. Most of these schools underscore the importance of "safety" and "nurturing" first. See the mission statements of MLK Positive Learning Community in Hartford, CT, https://www.hartfordschools.org/our-vision-and-mission/; Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School in Huntsville, AL, https://www.huntsvillecityschools.org/schools/martin-luther-king-jr-elementary/martin-luther-king-jr-elementary; Dr. King

students to engage in critical thinking and self-initiated learning, and to develop a desire to attend university. This last motivation, attending university (and the implied upward mobility that a university degree can afford the holder), features highly on the list of priorities of the majority of American MLK schools.

Though most American MLK schools emphasize academic performance above all else, they subscribe to King's assertion that "intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."[24] As schools that have declared an association with King, they also stress the importance of creating individuals with a sense of social responsibility and desire for equality. The same schools repeatedly mention "citizens," be they "global," "productive," "compassionate," or "respectful." They see the second part of their mission as creating "leaders of tomorrow" who have "personal agency" and "make future contributions" in their local communities and "internationally." They do this by encouraging "cooperation," "respect," and "collaboration." Most of the schools in one way or another declare that their students must be prepared to engage with the larger world and strive to make it the "Beloved Community."[25]

American MLK schools do not possess or offer a singular version of a cultural identity, but they are nonetheless quite consistent. Regardless of

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Charter School in New Orleans, LA, http://drkingcharterschool.org/; Martin Luther King, Jr., Learning Center in Dallas, TX, https://www.dallasisd.org/domain/1768; Martin Luther King High School in Davis, CA, https://mlk-djusd-ca.schoolloop.com/; Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary in Sacramento, CA, https://mlk.scusd.edu/our-vision-and-mission; and Martin Luther King, Jr., Education Center in Eugene, OR, http://lanecounty.hosted.civiclive.com/cms/one.aspx?portalId=3585881&pageId=4225245.

24. Martin Luther King, Jr., "On the Purpose of Education," *Maroon Tiger*, January–February 1947, available online at http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_470200_000.1.html. A number of American MLK school websites quote this sentence. See for example the websites of MLK Schools in Springfield, MA, http://www.mlkcs.org/ and Berkeley, CA, http://www.mlkmiddleschool.org/, as well as the MLK School of the Arts in Seaside, CA, https://king.mpusd.k12.ca.us/.

25. A term coined at the beginning of the twentieth century by Josiah Royce and popularized by King. As the King Memorial Center explains, "Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood." "The King Philosophy," The King Center Digital Archive, http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy.

location or composition, MLK schools view education much in the two-fold manner that King himself did: as practical and character-building. While the majority culture perceives MLK schools as troubled spaces teeming with equally troubled African Americans, MLK schools see themselves as standard-bearers in the continuing fight for equality, equipping students with the academic preparation they need to break through the boundaries set by the majority culture. MLK schools do not see themselves as black or white, urban or suburban, wealthy or impoverished, but as educational institutions determined to create local and global agents of positive change, much like any other public school in America. This will not necessarily sway the views of people like the concerned parents of Riverside, but the schools present a cultural identity vastly different from the one that majority culture has assigned to them. In the United States, the polyvocality of MLK schools is primarily binary, with majority culture maintaining a pessimistic, racialized, and condescending view of MLK schools and the students themselves, despite the wide variance in their locations, agendas, and student bodies, virtually all declaring the same bedrock principles of academic preparation and citizen-creation. These principles, as the school board member in Riverside said, are "transracial," which all of the mission statements echo to one degree or another.

When schools name themselves after King, they publicly and firmly declare their alignment with principles of excellence and equal opportunity. They convey to their students and the attendant community the values they want them to adopt. But more significant is the notion that the decision to name a school after King is also an act of speaking truth to power, reminding the majority culture that the fight for civil rights has not ended, that the marginalized and segregated refuse to remain so, that they will use education to destroy the boundaries imposed by institutionalized discrimination and racism, and the fight will not end until the Beloved Community has been achieved locally and globally. Naming a school after King is in effect an act of defiance.

When MLK schools speak of global citizens and communities, they most likely do so without the knowledge that they have international counterparts. Though a number of countries have schools named after King,[26] most of them are located in the Federal Republic of Germany,

26. There are MLK Schools in Ghana, France, Peru, Mexico, St. Martin, and a couple other countries, but none of them have such a high number of MLK schools as Germany does.

which boasts a total of twenty-two. They are spread throughout the western part of the country,[27] with the majority of them located in the federal states North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate. Upon initial inspection, German MLK schools appear quite similar to their American counterparts. They also tend to educate younger children more than older ones, are often found in urban areas, and are conspicuously ethnically and culturally diverse.

However, the practice of naming a school after King has experienced a transculturation in Germany. As Fernando Ortiz wrote when he coined the term, he preferred it to the notion of "acculturation," which is "used to describe the transition of one culture to another." For Ortiz, transculturation represents the "highly varied phenomena" that come about as a result of "extremely complex transmutations of culture." Ortiz further asserts that it "necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation." "In the end," Ortiz writes, "the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them."[28] And the union of Germany and the United States in this particular context has born some interesting fruit indeed.

The conceptualization and practice of MLK schools in the United States has undergone a radical transculturation in Germany, primarily due to the significantly different structure of the German school system. Where American public schools are ideally "democratic," requiring all children to attend elementary, middle or junior high, and then high school, at least to the age of sixteen, Germany employs a selective system in which students are evaluated at a relatively young age, when still in *Grundschule* (equivalent to elementary school), at approximately ten years old, before they enter fifth or sixth grade, and they are then placed into different schools. According to their academic performance and the evaluation of their social skills, which is assessed by way of standardized tests and teacher evaluations, the children can be directed to one of four secondary schools:

27. There are no MLK schools in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, or Saxony, the federal states that constituted the former German Democratic Republic (GDR).

28. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press 1995), pp. 97–98.

Hauptschule (basic secondary school, which ends at grade 9 or 10 and serves as a basis for practical vocational training), *Realschule* (intermediate school, which ends at grade 10 and allows for training in medium-level occupations and admission to trade schools), *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school—not available in all federal states—which combines different types of secondary schools and gives students the opportunity to obtain university qualification), and *Gymnasium* (equivalent to the British grammar school, which awards a certificate that qualifies its holders for studies at all institutions of higher education). Some children are channeled into *Förderschule* (special needs schools for children with physical, developmental, or learning disabilities or social-emotional challenges). Parents are entitled to challenge a school's decision, which more often involves upward turns rather than downward ones.

Of the twenty-two MLK schools in Germany, three are *Hauptschulen*, three are *Gesamtschulen*, and fourteen are *Förderschulen*. None of them are *Realschulen* or *Gymnasien*. In other words, the majority of German MLK schools are special needs schools. As *Hauptschulen* do not offer any pathways to university education and attending a *Förderschule* "dramatically reduces future chances of gaining admission"[29] to a *Gesamtschule* or *Gymnasium*, German MLK schools engage in an immediate deculturation, losing one of the elements central to the cultural identity of American MLK schools: they do not function as vehicles to higher education and thus more socioeconomic opportunity.

The vast majority of German MLK school mission statements reflect this very clearly, emphasizing not "intelligence and character" but "character and intelligence." They do not speak of preparing students for university, for making them "college ready" or turning them into "future scholars." Although they emphasize engendering a desire to learn in students, almost all of the mission statements avoid according primacy to academic excellence. They focus far more on other goals: (re)integrating students into mainstream life, advocating for equal rights, cultivating tolerance of and respect for diversity, and nonviolence. Most of the schools manage to incorporate all four goals at some level in their mission statements, and they almost always receive mention before academic performance.

German MLK schools, especially the *Förderschulen*, are dedicated to (re)integration. The MLK *Förderschule* in Hannover speaks of enabling

29. Özel Bagci, *Acculturation Orientations of Turkish Immigrants in Germany* (Tilburg: Tilburg University, 2012), p. 41.

"students to acquire skills that will enable them to live in society in an equitable manner." The MLK *Förderschule* in Düsseldorf states its "primary goal…is to return [students] to mainstream school." The MLK *Förderschule* in Göttingen stresses the importance of achieving "the highest possible degree of self-determination in life and work," independence, and the ability to navigate the standard world with a minimal amount of assistance. The MLK *Gemeinschaftsschule* (community school) in Saarlouis, a pilot inclusion school for the region of Saarland, stresses the importance of the "integration of students with disabilities" and has won the Ministry of Education's Tolerance Prize.

(Re)integration also involves separating students with special needs from the stigma of their school names. The MLK *Förderschule* in Münster chose to name itself after King in 1986 because it wanted a new name that would "enable a higher level of identification with the school [and] prevent stigmatization." In Castrop-Rauxel, the decision to name the *Förderschule* after King was based on similar reasoning, at least for the students. School staff and parents both agreed that renaming the school after King was a good idea. But the student council still had to approve it. As principal Wolfgang Scholl wrote:[30]

> We had the only school in the community that was called by its full name. All other schools had an abbreviation accepted in youth circles: WBG (Willy-Brandt-Gesamtschule), FHH (Franz-Hillebrand-Hauptschule), FNR (Fridtjoff-Nansen-Realschule). It was always very unpleasant for our students to be recognized by the name of the school as special needs students. At the meeting of the student council, the students had the choice between 3 possible school names. Their criterion was: How can the future school name best be abbreviated—and MLK was simply unbeatable.[31]

The students chose the name not for the person's commitment to integration but for the manner in which the name itself integrated with the others in the area. Instead of being the students from the special needs school, they would become students from another "three-letter school," making

30. After sending inquiries to the twenty-two MLK schools in Germany, I was fortunate enough to receive answers from three principles: Bernd Schmitz in Saarlouis, Wolfgang Scholl in Castrop Rauxel, and Monica Kollipilai in Mainz. I thank them very much for sending thoughtful responses to my questions.

31. Email from Wolfgang Scholl.

them just like everyone else. They used King to reinvent themselves, to engage in a kind of identity rebranding.

Any German MLK school that has any kind of online profile will further underscore its diversity and the equality of every individual within its walls. From Hessen to North-Rhine Westphalia to Bavaria, almost all German MLK schools mention ethnic, cultural, or religious diversity. The MLK *Förderschule* in Velbert exhorts its community of students to remember that King "fought to ensure that black and white people have equal educational opportunities." In Bad Kreuznach, the MLK *Förderschule* writes of King's dream of equality for everyone, "no matter what skin color they are, what language they speak, what country they come from." The MLK schools in Berlin also place a high premium on acknowledging diversity.

The MLK *Grundschule* (elementary school) in Mainz, which is not a *Förderschule*,[32] provides a striking mission statement, alluding to the "famous speech of Dr. Martin Luther King 'I Have a Dream,' [which] should mean that we see reality as it is and 'dream' that all students of our school learn with each other and acquire the same educational opportunities and foundations." Principal Monica Kollipilai provided a very specific answer to my inquiry: "At our school we work, learn, and live with a large number of children from different nations and different backgrounds. . . . Multicultural learning is one of the main focuses of our school. . . . In the coming year, we will be holding a training course and an exhibition on the subject of 'Diversity with Children.' It is about everyday racism and empowerment in daycare centers and schools." In Mainz, diversity does not seem to be *a* central issue but *the* central issue.

But even more than diversity and equality, German MLK schools constantly call for respect and tolerance. The MLK school in Saarlouis speaks of "solidarity, mutual respect, and tolerance." In Düsseldorf, "The students and teachers of the Martin Luther King School treat each other with respect and friendliness. Everyone has the right to be treated with respect in school and has the duty to treat others in the same way." In Marl, the MLK *Gesamtschule* declares, "The guiding principles for living together in our school are respect for others and the preservation of the environment." Principal Kollipilai in Mainz wrote, "Mutual respect and acceptance, even with different religious backgrounds, is practiced daily."

32. All other MLK *Grundschulen* are *Förderschulen*, but not all MLK *Förderschulen* are *Grundschulen*.

The MLK *Gesamtschule* in Dortmund quotes King: "We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together."[33] Accordingly, the school wants "to strive for what Martin Luther King also calls for: to preserve peace and foster human coexistence with respect, tolerance, and nonviolence."

Virtually all German MLK schools advocate nonviolence or nonviolent conflict resolution, which is also understood as coexisting in peace. One school "work[s] with the pupils to deal with the conflicts that occur in everyday school life." The MLK school in Düsseldorf talks of King achieving his goals "in a nonviolent manner." In Dortmund, they strive "for what Martin Luther King also calls for: to preserve peace" by way of nonviolence. The MLK *Hauptschule* in Velbert writes, "When you hear the name 'Martin Luther King School,' you should be reminded that our school stands for peaceful coexistence!" The MLK *Förderschule* in Trier-Ruwer believes that "everyone should be able to learn in peace." The staff in Castrop-Rauxel chose to name their school after King for three "key points: nonviolence, equality, sociocultural diversity, i.e., relatively general but generally recognized positions. Who can be against nonviolence?" The principal at the MLK school in Saarlouis highlighted the school's support for "the peaceful coexistence of people in different countries." While many American MLK schools also advocate safe and peaceful environments, peaceful coexistence seems to be at the heart of the *raison d'être* of many German MLK schools.

In sum, the transculturation of the practice of naming a school after King in Germany is essentially a transmutation of priorities. German MLK schools are more concerned with "peaceful coexistence," "respect for all people," "nonviolence," "tolerance," and "equal rights." The fact that academic preparation for university studies falls to the bottom of the priorities list, if not altogether disappears, suggests that the decision to name a school after King in Germany derives from a greater need to address concerns that center on integration. While both American and German MLK schools by virtue of their namesake identify the worth and equality of every individual as a point of departure, they diverge and follow different paths soon after. American MLK schools assert an orientation toward equipping students with a competitive educational edge that will help them clear the hurdles of systemic racism and create a more equitable

33. Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Quest for Peace and Justice," December 11, 1964, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-lecture.html.

society for all, while German MLK schools endeavor to establish "peace," to resolve conflicts that seem to arise due to highly diverse student bodies. How did this take place?

As mentioned earlier, the German school system plays a significant role in the transculturation of MLK schools in Germany. Although mission statements from some *Realschulen* and *Gymnasien* advocate diversity, nonviolence, and respect, they do not appear as top priorities.[34] If the distribution of students across ethnicities and cultures were even, we might see all schools establishing relatively similar agendas regarding diversity. But this is not the case. And, as previously observed, no *Realschulen* or *Gymnasien* have adopted King as their namesake. Why do *Hauptschulen*, *Gesamtschulen*, and primarily *Förderschulen* gravitate toward King as their namesake? What distinguishes them from *Realschulen* or *Gymnasien*?

For one, *Hauptschulen* and *Gesamtschulen* typically have far more diverse student bodies, because a higher number of students with migration backgrounds attend them than do German students. Though it is difficult to obtain consistent educational census data in Germany, researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that children with migration backgrounds, particularly Turkish children, are channeled into *Hauptschulen* and *Gesamtschulen* more often than are German children. In general, children with migration backgrounds constitute 38% of students attending *Hauptschulen* or *Gesamtschulen* in Germany. For Turks, the figure is even more staggering. One study in 2006 revealed that "The attendance rate to *Hauptschule* . . . is dramatically higher [for Turks] than the German students' rate of attendance: 50 to 21%."[35]

Gesamtschulen, which are more prevalent in the federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia than anywhere else,[36] host an even higher number of

34. A cursory examination of mission statements from various *Gymnasien* and *Realschulen* across Germany reveals a different ethos, with stress placed first on academics and diversity and tolerance taking up the rear.

35. Carl-Ulrik Schierup et al., *Migration, Citizenship, and the European Welfare State: A European Dilemma* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), p. 159, cited by Patricia Fernandez-Kelley, "The Unequal Structure of the German Education System: Structural Reasons for Educational Failures of Turkish Youth in Germany," *Spaces & Flows* 2, no. 2 (2012): 93–112.

36. The state of North-Rhine Westphalia has a longer history with immigrants than do other parts of the country because of its industrial history. The state began inviting immigrants to work the coal mines in the area beginning in the nineteenth century. However, it is more well-known as home to the largest number of guest workers in postwar Germany. To

children with migration backgrounds. As the Association of Philologists of North-Rhine Westphalia states, "A high proportion of migrants is not uncommon in *Gesamtschulen*. According to the statistical survey of the Ministry of Education and Training from April 2010, the proportion of pupils with migration backgrounds in *Hauptschulen* is 38.2%, but only 18.4% in *Gymnasien* and 50.7% in *Gesamtschulen*. At *Brennpunktschulen* [equivalent to Title I schools], the number of migrants can reach 80% or more."[37]

How does this come to be? A few major schools of thought have emerged about this. One emphasizes a "cultural distance,"[38] that children with migration backgrounds typically have parents with lower educational levels and low German-language proficiency. They are therefore less capable of navigating the German school system and its resources, which leads to an inability to provide their children with all the educational opportunities available. The same school of thought posits that Turks, the largest group of people in Germany with migration backgrounds, are especially resistant to integration because of religious differences and return orientations. This explanation places the responsibility firmly at the feet of the immigrant, depicting the problem as an outgrowth of their unintentional and intentional resistance to the host culture that, to their own detriment, perpetuates socioeconomic disadvantages.

The other school of thought focuses on institutional discriminatory practices "that maintain and reproduce social stratification, and systematically disadvantage children with migrant backgrounds."[39] Some of these practices are direct, as in the case of teachers in Bielefeld who used ethnicity as a criteria for deciding which students should attend *Förderschule*.[40] In other instances, the discriminatory practices are more subtle, such as the choices that German parents make regarding whether their children attend schools in their own mixed neighborhoods or in more

this day, it still is the state with the largest number of residents with migration backgrounds, and the largest number of Turks.

37. Philologen Verband Nordrhein-Westfalen, "Perspektive der Gesamtschule," March 2011, https://www.phv-nw.de/sites/default/files/pdf/phv_positionen_gesamtschule.pdf, p. 2.

38. See Heike Diefenbach, "'Bringing Boys Back In' Revisited: Ein Rückblick auf die Bisherige Debatte über die Nachteile von Jungen im deutschen Bildungssystem," in *Geschlechtsspezifische Bildungsungleichheiten*, ed. Andreas Hadjar (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), pp. 333–65; Susanne Worbs, "The Second Generation in Germany: Between School and Labor Market," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 4 (2006): 1011–38.

39. Fernandez-Kelly, "The Unequal Structure of the German Education System."

40. Mechthild Gomolla and Frank-Olaf Radtke, *Institutionelle Diskriminierung: Die Herstellung ethnischer Differenz in der Schule* (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2009).

homogenous ones further afield that possibly offer more specialized curricula and better resources and staff. Sometimes that subtle discrimination can take the form of school staff and administrators ignoring requests for help from students who experience discrimination and racism from other class members.[41] As Janina Söhn and Veysel Özcan suggest, "Decisions by organizations (school administrators and local authorities) as well as individuals, i.e., parents, thus have the unintended consequences of enforcing ethnic segregation in schools, which is officially deplored by some and silently approved of by others."[42]

More recently, a third explanation has emerged, and revolves around one factor: language. In 2010, the UN General Assembly/Human Rights Council levied criticism against the German school system for separating children into different educational tiers at such an early age, because children who were non-native speakers of German would inevitably occupy a disadvantaged position. The UN Special Rapporteur on Racism cited this as a factor that contributes to the "overrepresentation of minority students in the lower school stratum."[43] Özel Bagci illustrates this in the example of the difficulties that Turkish students often have in this context:

> In mixed schools Turkish pupils with a low level of German language skills are often put in special classes where German language is the main subject. While this does improve the pupils' German language skills,

41. The 2010 update report on "Racism and Ethnic Discrimination in Germany," issued by the European Forum for Migration Studies, recounts an example of how school administrators ignore claims of racism: "A primary school pupil was continuously bullied and insulted by his schoolmates because of his dark skin. His mother overheard one day that a schoolmate shouted at her son he should 'piss off and go where people with such a dirty skin colour belong'. As the teacher who had noticed the incidents did not interfere, she decided to talk to her son's main teacher and the school's principal—without success. The school expressed the opinion that 'nine year old children do not have racist attitudes and hence their behaviour toward others can not be called racist'; the mother was criticised for causing trouble. Together with the anti-discrimination office the mother sought to solve the problem, but the school refused to admit any problems. In the end, the mother decided to register her son at another school." Mario Peucker, "Racism and Ethnic Discrimination in Germany: Update Report, 2010," European Forum for Migration Studies, October 2010, p. 19.

42. Janina Söhn and Veysel Özcan, "The Educational Attainment of Turkish Migrants in Germany," *Turkish Studies* 7, no. 1 (2006): 107.

43. See UN General Assembly Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Githu Muigai," A/HRC/14/43, and addendum "Mission to Germany," A/HRC/14/43/Add.2, p. 11.

> another problem arises, and that is they are prevented from participating in the main school curriculum, which is crucial for attaining the level necessary to move on to the appropriate secondary school.[44]

Children with migration backgrounds are caught in an educational catch-22. The equation may have a large number of possible variables, but the result is the same. More often than not, children with migration backgrounds, especially Turkish children, do not move on to *Realschule* or *Gymnasium*.

Even more striking than the rate at which children with migration backgrounds end up in *Hauptschulen* and *Gesamtschulen* is the rate at which they are sent to *Förderschulen*, special needs schools. A number of studies have reached the same conclusion: children with migration backgrounds, particularly Turkish children, are sent to special needs schools much more often than German children. In 2000, twice as many children with migration backgrounds attended special schools for learning disabilities as German children. "Turkish children's risk of attending a special needs school is almost twice as high (1.9) as German children, although this number is highest for children from Serbia and Montenegro (4.9)."[45] More recent studies have not shown much of a change in these figures.[46] This does not bode well for children with migration backgrounds as, underscored in Bagci's research, "Attending special education schools for students with learning disabilities increases one's risk of completing compulsory education without any school certificate."

Hauptschulen, *Gesamtschulen*, and *Förderschulen* are not only home to a disproportionate number of children with migration backgrounds, but they are also the sites of a disproportionately high rate of verbal and physical violence. The German media have reported a great deal about the violence in *Hauptschulen*,[47] but the emphasis all three schools place

44. Bagci, *Acculturation Orientations of Turkish Immigrants in Germany*, p. 41.

45. Söhn and Özcan, "The Educational Attainment of Turkish Migrants in Germany," p. 108.

46. See Czarina Wilpert, "National Case Study: Muslim Youth in Germany" (paper presented at conference "Muslim Youth in Europe: Typologies of Religious Belonging and Sociocultural Dynamics," Turin, Italy, June 11, 2004), http://www.cestim.it/argomenti/02islam/02islam_wilpert_germania.pdf.

47. See, for example, Carola Padtberg, "Problemfall Hauptschule: Sammelbecken der Gewalt," *Spiegel Online*, March 30, 2006, http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/problemfall-hauptschule-sammelbecken-der-gewalt-a-408835.html; Dirk Baier and Christian Pfeiffer, "Hauptschulen und Gewalt," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, June 29,

on nonviolence indicates that they all are confronted with it. There is not enough space in this paper to discuss the possible reasons for these rates, but researchers have explored the interplay between systemic racism and violence in schools. In the case of Germany, the effective segregation of minorities from the mainstream culture has helped foster these internal conflicts. Conflicts that arise in the cultural arenas of *Hauptschulen*, *Gesamtschulen*, and *Förderschulen* often take place not between "majority" and "minority" cultures but between "minority" and "minority" cultures. The battle over which version of cultural identity the school will promote, because of the limitations placed on it, are reduced to disputes between marginalized groups rather than confrontations with the majority culture over its exclusionary practices. And these disputes are often conducted physically.

These problems—the disproportionately high numbers of children with migration backgrounds in *Hauptschulen*, *Gesamtschulen*, and *Förderschulen*, direct and indirect discrimination, and incidents of violence motivated by racism on school grounds—are tied to Germany's resistance to seeing itself as a country with immigrants and recognizing the need to implement policies to facilitate integration. Although it became clear by the mid-1970s that guest workers were not returning home as the German state had expected and even tried to engineer, the government did not develop initiatives to minimize the development of one of its greatest fears: a parallel society. Instead, it maintained the position that migrants should eventually return home. And despite all data that show that Germany needs immigrants due to a shrinking birth rate, a large portion of the majority culture still contends that immigrants are unwanted.[48] The majority culture tolerates immigrants under the condition that they acculturate. However, German culture tends to conceive of this as one-way

2007, http://www.bpb.de/apuz/30375/hauptschulen-und-gewalt; Christian Schwägerl, "Der Intensivtäter wird zum Vorbild," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 31, 2006; Freia Peters, "So chaotisch geht es an deutschen Schulen," *Die Welt*, June 19, 2011; Marek Fuchs, *Schule und Gewalt: Realität und Wahrnehmung eines sozialen Problems* (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

48. In 2006, at a conference on integration, Minister of the Interior Walter Schäuble stated, "We were never an immigrant country, and we still aren't." Thilo Sarrazin's 2010 book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany is eliminating itself) was a best-seller. Right-wing parties that advocate anti-immigration policies have increased in popularity over the last decade, and the party Alternative für Deutschland now has garnered seats in the Bundestag.

assimilation rather than two-way integration, particularly regarding language.[49] Those who do not speak German well typically do not get access to any of the resources that promote upward mobility or integration, a punitive marginalization that has led to ethnic segregation in all aspects of life, especially in education.

However, recent events, particularly the influx of refugees and asylum seekers during the last ten years, have begun to force Germany's hand. As the number of people with migration backgrounds slowly increases and inevitably spreads to the east, where the reception of people with migration backgrounds has all too often taken the form of outright discrimination or violence, the state has had to reckon with the need to engage more proactively. It has created new agencies like the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees), instituted mandatory language and integration courses, totaling 700 hours of instruction, and opened counseling centers. But those efforts still need serious refining and more input from the people they are trying to integrate.

At the same time, and perhaps because of this, the minority culture has begun to respond in a variety of ways, insisting upon acknowledgment of its equal worth and compromise in the area of integration. One method it has started using involves inscribing public spaces with their values and beliefs by naming them. And, as in the United States, one of the most significant public spaces that virtually everyone has contact with at one point or another is school. In the educational context, people with migration backgrounds and the Germans who support them are adjusting their collective voice, and it occasionally seems to bear the tenor of King's legacy. Because the phenomenon of systemic racism in education is so similar, because children with migration backgrounds in Germany are often mirror images of minority children and children with migration backgrounds in the United States (lower socioeconomic status, less access to educational opportunity, racial profiling, etc.), and because many Germans already have some kind of conceptual relationship with King, it seems logical that schools experiencing and objecting to the side effects

49. For an example of this, see the television advertising campaign "Sag's auf Deutsch," targeting individuals with migration backgrounds, encouraging them to learn or improve their German. The campaign had a more condescending tone than intended, despite the use of "minorities" famous in Germany. In addition, the commercial does not use any subtitles, which somewhat defeats the purpose of communicating with individuals who speak little or no German.

of the state's insistence upon uncritical acculturation would adopt King as their namesake in the same way that American schools have: to call for equality.

But some parts of the call get lost in translation, while others are significantly altered. The absence of emphasis on acquiring a university education, of developing character and *then* intelligence, and the greater focus on the Beloved Classroom rather than the Beloved Community have their own side effects. The emphasis of character over intelligence has perhaps led to some inadvertent educational shortchanging, for example, in conveying the elements of German *Leitkultur*, which upper-tier secondary schools foster. The German sense of history, of the value of education as an end to itself, of *Leistung*, of the position that language holds, of a society in which religion is part but not parcel must be actively conveyed, not simply taken for granted. In neglecting the *Leitkultur*, especially in the context of language, German MLK schools unintentionally deprive students of a portion of cultural currency that could afford them new opportunities.

Furthermore, and most interestingly, in trying to distance themselves from stigma, *Förderschulen* may have inadvertently created a new one. Because of polyvocality, a school for special needs may name itself after King to convey the message of equality, but other groups and cultures may attach other associations and references to it that may "neutralize or even counteract the original intention." At some point in the future, a community in Germany may find itself embroiled in a debate over naming a school after King, one that possesses the same tone as Riverside, but still sounds quite different.

But we cannot ignore broader, beneficial phenomena that arise from this transculturation, such as the internal polyvocality that emerges. When schools in Germany name themselves after King, they are in effect sending multiple messages to multiple groups, both majority and minority. On the one hand, these schools are telling their students to respect diversity, to employ nonviolent means of conflict resolution, and to take more control over their lives. They are also telling their students, as in the example of the MLK school in Mainz, to acknowledge the "real" world, to have no illusions about their situation and its larger import, and to make strides toward changing it. This is a very powerful message, one that does not necessarily try to comfort students but attempts to fortify them for the inevitable hurdles they will have to clear.

On the other hand, these schools, by naming themselves after King, are also speaking truth to power. They speak a different truth, though, than their American counterparts. While American schools declare their continued dedication to the struggle for equality when they adopt King's name, a result of the fact that the discourse over equality, specifically the integration of schools, has been taking place for decades already, German schools confront the majority culture, directly and publicly accusing it for the first time of systemic bias and deliberate marginalization. Naming a school after King, particularly when he is not "homegrown," is a definitive challenge from the minority culture directed at the majority culture. It is the identification of a representative icon for a movement. The act, as the Germans say, "calls the child by name."

This transculturation also adds a transatlantic polyvocality to the schools named after King. Within Germany, they invoke and advocate two major concepts: integration and embracing nonviolence, values on which American MLK schools can agree. But there is also potential for conflict over the version of cultural identity that will occupy the spotlight on the global stage. The absence from German MLK schools of one of the goals so near and dear to American ones, academic preparedness in order to cultivate an even stronger character, an even stronger citizen, may cause some trepidation on the other side of the pond. From an American perspective, particularly an African American one like my own, one might feel an unease at the fact that MLK schools could potentially evoke a number of additional associations, some of them positive, some of them negative.

I voiced this unease to many Germans over the last few months. When I told them about the fact that most MLK schools in the country are *Förderschulen*, they initially also demonstrated a degree of discomfort. But quickly enough, they almost always responded with, "But is there actually something wrong with that?"